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The Remembrance of Enslavement in the Atlantic Ocean Space in Postcolonial Port Towns: Barcelona and Cadiz, Havana and Matanzas

ABSTRACT The chapter refers to the remembrance of seafaring in the Atlantic Ocean in two Spanish and two Cuban port towns. The memorial cityscapes of the Spanish ports are full of symbols related to the sea. Museums and monuments reflect pride in brave seamen and adventurous merchants trading exotic goods. They ignore completely (in Cadiz) and predominantly (in Barcelona) that the main “merchandise” were human beings and the Atlantic Ocean was a big wet graveyard. Captives were deported from Africa to the Americas and the Caribbean to be exploited until an early death on sugar, coffee, and cotton fields. In Cuba, plantation slavery is remembered, but separated from the sea’s history and without looking at racism as a legacy of enslavement. The voices of the enslaved are absent on both sides of the Atlantic. The chapter asks for the reasons for these silences and ways to decolonize the images of maritime history.

KEYWORDS Atlantic Ocean, decolonization, enslavement, memories, museums

Introduction

This article presents results from my research project on *Memories of Atlantic Slavery in France and Spain, the French Caribbean and Cuba*.¹ During archival stays on both sides of the Atlantic for a book on enslavement and

1 This article presents results from a project funded by the German Research Foundation (project no. 393718958). I summarize here the research on Spain carried out between 2018 and 2022 and Cuba in 2019.

post-emancipation in Martinique and Cuba (Schmieder 2017),² I came across the silence about sites related to trafficking of African captives via the Atlantic and distorted narratives on places where enslaved Africans had arrived and had been exploited. That is why I chose the focus on physical sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*,³ museums, monuments, and relics of enslavement⁴ on both sides of the Atlantic, such as the departure and arrival ports for the traffic of African captives and tropical staple goods, the ruins of sugar mills, enslavers' houses, barracks, villages, and cemeteries of the enslaved in the Caribbean, private residences and public institutions financed by enslavement in the space of the Atlantic Ocean, and sites connected with enslaved Africans in Europe. This is, of course, a topic closely related to oceans as spaces for the movement of persons, goods, and ideas, in the past and in the present. "The Atlantic" as a historical space was created by the trade in African captives and the related slavery-based economy, whose legacies still shape the relations between the three continents today. The Antillean writer Édouard Glissant used the terms *gouffre* (chasm) and *abîme* (abyss) to describe the experience of deported African captives confronted with three abysses: the ship's belly, the sea into which the corpses were thrown, and the terrifying unknown fate that awaited them (Glissant 1990, 17–8). This idea was taken up as the title of a recent exhibition "The Abyss. Nantes's role in the slave trade and colonial slavery 1707–1830" (Musée d'Histoire, Nantes, 2021–2022, Gualdé 2021), in which the audio-visualization of the

2 I study the memories of enslavement in regions where I have expertise in its history. For the current project it was important to include the (former) colonial powers as spaces where the profits went to. Besides, the maritime cityscapes of French and Spanish port towns are marked much more by the involvement in the traffic of African captives than is usually admitted. The selection of countries as research object shall also fill research gaps; for the lack of comparative studies referring to the history and memory of enslavement in France and Spain and the Francophone and Hispanophone Caribbean see the chapter on historiography in my forthcoming book: *Versklavung im Atlantischen Raum: Orte des Gedenkens—Orte des Verschweigens*.

3 Pierra Nora (1984–1992) defined "site of memory" in a very broad sense, which may also include a person such as Jeanne d'Arc, or the Larousse Encyclopaedia. I have researched only the set of memorial sites described above, but I take from Nora the idea that a monument becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if ritualized ceremonies of remembrance take place there.

4 I use the term "enslavement" as referring to the violent process of enslaving humans, reducing them to a commodity, against their resistance, and I understand "slavery" as meaning the legal institution (abolished in Cuba in 1886) and the economic system related to European and American capitalism.

ocean-crossing Nantais ship *Marie-S raphique* with 192 enslaved Africans onboard plays a central role.⁵

Spanish port towns involved in human trafficking are far removed from such a decolonial approach to ocean history. Maritime and oceanic history there is associated with challenging encounters with untamed nature, heroic adventurers who cross dangerous seas, scientific explorers who “discover” other worlds and peoples, and successful merchants who bring back glamorous exotic products. This chapter will examine whether the narrative of a glorious maritime past changes with a (possible) decolonization of memorial sites. With respect to Cuba, one would suppose that maritime history is automatically remembered in connection with human trafficking and the exploitation of enslaved Africans on which the island’s economy has been based for nearly 400 years. In practice, enslavement and resistance are silenced and downplayed at many historical sites and museums. Where they are remembered, this often occurs uncoupled from maritime history told as the history of pirates and wars omitting human trafficking. This chapter will look at these gaps and the reasons for them.

With respect to Spain and Cuba, the following questions are relevant. Where do the memories of the Atlantic Ocean, seafaring, ships, and maritime activities appear? Is the celebration of maritime history related to the remembrance of the ocean traffic of enslaved Africans to the Americas and of goods produced by them and sent to Europe, or are those entanglements silenced? If maritime memories are connected to enslavement, in which sense are they connected, in a still colonial or a decolonized mindset? What references are made to the perpetrators, the profiteers, and the victims of human trafficking? Is there an awareness that the Atlantic Ocean was a graveyard of enslaved humans, but also a space of resistance and liberation wars (Taylor 2009)? What allusions are made to African societies?

This study is based on the documentation and analysis of the visual and textual representations of the enslavement in the Atlantic Ocean space (and related omissions) in museums, at monuments and material vestiges left by enslavers and the enslaved in Spanish and Cuban port towns. The author interviewed persons who have an agency around the sites of memory, museum staff and functionaries of cultural politics, scholars, activists, artists, and politicians engaged in local politics of memory. Special attention was paid to the inclusion of Afro-Spanish and Afro-Cuban experts as interview partners. Participant observations at guided tours in museums or on the traces of enslavers and enslaved in towns, public discussions about the memories and silences about enslavement, commemorative

5 My observations were made on November 17 and 18, 2021.

ceremonies, and protest manifestations on the occasion of anniversaries and commemorative days complemented the research. Publications about the sites and events of commemorations in the press and websites (of towns, museums, memorial associations, etc.) were also analysed.

In investigating the under-researched case of Cadiz and comparing Barcelona and Cadiz with very different cultures of memory of enslavement, this chapter goes beyond the existing studies about sites of memory of enslavement in Spain, which focus on Barcelona, predominantly (Surwillo 2014) or exclusively (Tsuchiya 2019; Guixé Coromines and Ricart Ulldemolins 2020; Rodrigo y Alharilla 2021b). Critical studies on the silence about or distortion of the history of enslavement in Cuban museums and plantation sites and alternative forms of remembrance are produced mostly outside Cuba. But they refer to arts (de la Fuente 2008), not museums and monuments, or to one single site of memory (Anecchiarico 2018; Toutain 2017), except for my studies that systematically document monuments and museums in the Cuban West, the zone of big plantations (Schmieder 2021a and b). The exceptions refer to memories of enslavement in general, not particularly to sites of memory (Romay 2015; Zurbano 2021), the latter with the brief mention of the museum in Triunvirato. Some Cuban or Spanish–Cuban co-produced studies describe the maroon settlement archaeology in the island’s interior and related sites (Hernández de Lara et al. 2013) or provide a descriptive history of museums (Granado Duque 2018). They do not offer a critical decolonial view on the representation of enslavement at these places. There are no studies that compare and connect Spanish and Cuban sites of memory and sites of oblivion of the enslavement past as this chapter does.

Maritime Colonial Nostalgia and an (Almost Complete) Silence about Enslavement in Spain

Spanish port towns were starting points of the trade regulated through licenses or monopoly contracts (*asientos*) in certain periods, and they were constant hubs during the free “legal” commerce and illegal trafficking of enslaved Africans (1525–1789, 1789–1819, 1820–1867/73) (Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015; Zeuske 2004, 395). The late trade in human beings went particularly to Brazil and Cuba, Spain being the second most important nation in human trafficking via the Atlantic Ocean in the nineteenth century (after Portugal/Brazil) according to recent research (Borucki, Eltis, and Wheat 2015, 440, TSTD II 2022). Here, I focus on Cadiz, with

116 voyages of human trafficking between 1717 and 1866 (Chaviano Pérez 2018, 171), and Barcelona, with 146 deportation voyages between 1789 and 1820 and an unknown number of illegal ocean crossings (Fradera 1984, 124, 138–9). Barcelona, at that time, was the “capital city of financial return” from enslavement (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2012), followed by Madrid, Cadiz, Santander, Bilbao, and Valencia (Cayuela and Bahamonde 1987, 135). As most deportation voyages between African coasts and Cuba did not follow the triangular route, but moved directly between African bases and Cuban ports, Spanish port towns’ involvement in enslavement was based on the traffickers born there (Zeuske 2015, 323–44), and on the above-mentioned capital transfer from the slavery-based economy. The historical role of Cadiz and Barcelona as leading Spanish port towns in the traffic of enslaved Africans and the material vestiges left in the port area and cityscapes suggested choosing these two maritime cities as research objects for an analysis of the (non)remembrance of this specific past.

Whereas Cadiz is situated on a peninsula in the Atlantic, opposite North Africa, Barcelona’s ships had a longer route to pass from the Mediterranean to the African and Caribbean coasts. This did not prevent Catalan ship owners from participating in this lucrative human trafficking (Zeuske 2017). The urban topography of Cadiz and Barcelona is marked by their nearness to the sea. On the peninsula of Cadiz, the coastline is situated only a few steps away from the city centre. Barcelona is marked by a long seafront and urban beaches. The giant hotel “La Vela” in the shape of a sail is a permanent reminder to inhabitants and tourists that Barcelona is a town of ships and seafarers.

Aside from their maritime character, the towns are very different: Barcelona is a vibrant, rich city with an impressive industrial past, which has successfully survived the transformation into a metropolis of modern services. Cadiz is an impoverished provincial town marked by nostalgia for a lost glorious past. The towns also handle their colonial pasts differently, although maritime colonial nostalgia is present in both. Multicultural Barcelona, the Spanish capital of social movements, radical trade unionists, and the left in general, is situated at one end of the spectrum of the treatment of enslavement and its heritage, while Cadiz is at the other end. The colonizer’s view of the Spanish Empire and the silence about the enslavement of Africans as part of it have been contested recently by scholars engaged in a decolonial public history, trade unionists, and anti-racist activists (López Badell 2016; Tebar Hurtado and Laviña 2020; Saliba Zeghondi 2020).

Antonio López y López, the first Marqués de Comillas, was a merchant of enslaved Africans and plantation owner in Santiago de Cuba, then

banker and estate speculator in Barcelona, but above all an entrepreneur running a fleet of steamships on the ocean between Spain and its former and remaining colonies (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2021a, 63–90, 131–66). His statue was, for the longest time, a thorn in the flesh of those who wanted to end the glorification of “great entrepreneurs” whose original fortune was based on enslavement. The monument’s pedestal refers to the shipping businesses of López, and it stands on a coastal avenue, the Passeig de Colom, next to the Lotja de Mar, formerly the seat of the Consulado del Mar and since 1886 seat of the Chamber of Industry, Commerce and Navigation. In March 2018, the leftist City Council under Mayor Ada Colau removed the statue of Antonio López at the request of various anti-racist NGOs and trade unionists (Tsuchiya 2019). This was and is a controversial decision as descendants of this wealthy family and conservative politicians from Cantabria, López’s home country, protested at the fall of the statue (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2021a, 9–29; Vinyes 2020). Engaged historians see the fact that the pedestal with its inscription glorifying Comillas on the bas-relief was left as an incomplete act of decolonizing Barcelona. They criticize the sparse content of the new explanatory panels, and the lack of reference to recent research (Laviña 2020; Rodrigo y Alharilla 2020).

Martín Rodrigo y Alharilla, the most important historian studying the city’s involvement in enslavement and capital transfer to Barcelona, was asked to speak at the *diada nacional* in September 2018, at the municipal celebration. This event is worthy of note as a national day normally serves to glorify a nation, not to look at the grim sides of the national past and the crimes behind prosperity. The historian emphasized the wide participation of Catalans in human trafficking from Africa, pointing not only to the merchants, but also to the captains and seamen involved. Thus, he contradicted the romantic or heroic narrative of the audacious seafaring nation which is supposed to be proud of its bravery on the high seas (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2018).

Interviews with Ricart Vinyes, Comissionat de Programes de Memòria from September 2015 to June 2018 (Vinyes 2020), responsible for the removal of the López statue, and with Jordi Rabassa, Regidor de Memòria Democràtica, and his colleague Angela Llorens (Rabassa and Llorens 2020) had left the impression that the former was more interested in decolonizing the urban cityscape than the latter. Obviously, the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 with many demonstrations in Barcelona changed the priorities.⁶ In 2021 the city council decided to rename part

6 See also the conference series (“Barcelona and Slavery: A Silenced History,” November 2021), inaugurated by Jordi Rabassa, BORN 2021.

of the Antonio López Square to Idrissa Diallo Square (Servei de Premsa 2021), a young man from Guinea who died in a refugee camp in 2012, as anti-racist and refugee-assistance NGOs had demanded, particularly the association *Tanquem els CIE* (Tanquem 2021). Now, the square is a reminder that even when African refugees do not die in the Mediterranean, which has become a graveyard as the Atlantic Ocean had been in the time of enslavement, they are not safe in Europe. Anti-Black racism as a legacy of enslavement continues to devalue Black lives.

The critical postcolonial view of a part of Barcelona's political class, academia, and civil society co-exists with a nationalist discourse which neglects the past of enslavement and presents Catalans as the permanent victims of the rulers of France and Spain. The Museum of History of Catalonia, an institution of the Catalan government, *La Generalitat*, refers to the ocean in celebrating Catalan cartographers and Catalan discoverers of the new world, Catalan overseas merchants, and Catalan overseas fishermen travelling as far as Patagonia. Besides the pride it expresses in Catalan participation in colonial ventures, it explicitly downplays the proven role of capital transfer from colonial trade to Catalan industrialization (Solà Parera 2012). In 2020 the museum admitted that between 1789 and 1819 30,000 Africans were transported on 146 Catalan deportation voyages to Cuba (numbers from Fradera 1984, 124), visualizing this commerce with a map focusing on the Atlantic Ocean. However, it said nothing about the more important illegal human trafficking (1820–1867). As merchandise, the enslaved were symbolized through chains; as human beings, they were nowhere represented in the museum.⁷ The curator and historian-consultant stated that the department of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would be refurbished. This should lead to a more critical view of the elite's involvement in colonial politics and enslavement (Rodon i Borrás and Iturralde Valls 2020). However, after the renovation of the museum, the number of trafficked persons and the map of the trade with African captives had disappeared, but the chains as a symbol of enslaved persons as merchandise had been maintained. There was less information about enslavement than before, given in one single sentence that cannot be interpreted as a postcolonial revision of discourses: "The Catalan bourgeoisie had a large presence in Cuba in various businesses (sugar, coffee, tobacco, etc.) and they defended the slave base of the island's economy (70 % of its population), in addition to the slave trade that many of them profited from

7 My observations were made on March 22, 2017 and January 30, 2020.

throughout the 19th century and that helped to create many fortunes in the Principality of Catalonia.”⁸

The Maritime Museum of Barcelona is situated in the *Drassanes* (dockyards) near the seafront. Its main attraction is the *Galera Real*, the flagship of the Holy League fleet in the battle of Lepanto (1571), symbolizing a glorious past of Spanish overseas dominance. In 2019 a new permanent gallery of the museum was inaugurated,⁹ which was obviously designed without a hint of decolonial thinking. Explanations do not express the slightest doubt as to whether Spaniards and Catalans had the right to conquer, dominate, and exploit oceans and territories, natural resources, and human beings on other continents. The war to defend their last colonies (Cuba and the Philippines, whose wars of independence are dismissed as “revolts”) is mentioned as a matter of fact, the genocidal warfare in Cuba omitted.

Here, the ocean is presented visually and textually (in written explanations and audios) as a space of shipping and seafaring, the acquisition of new skills, and the scientific exploration of unknown worlds, a space inspiring new technologies, a gigantic site for “overseas trade” with the Americas, migration to the Americas, and “war as business.” In a room devoted to “A huge market” an audio explains: “The Atlantic Ocean was the great transportation route for manufactured products and raw materials. With overseas trade, entrepreneurs, companies, and families of the metropolis made a fortune. It was a time of prosperity with a lot of light, but also of darkness that must not be forgotten” (Audio “The Atlantic Ocean – Cargoes and routes,” Maritime Museum of Barcelona). A big map of the Atlantic Ocean on the floor visualizes trade routes and shows all the colonial products (“cargo”) crossing the sea: sugar, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, spices, cotton, leather, silver—and enslaved Africans. They are reduced to merchandise, represented through chains, as said earlier; in addition, one kneeling enslaved African is represented imploring his liberation, the typical white abolitionist icon. In different display cases colonial products like sugar and cotton are shown and their uses is explained. The visitor can glimpse through bars at the shadows of nameless African captives in chains on board a ship. The corresponding audio says in a whispering, mysterious voice:

There is a type of cargo that nobody speaks about or which is spoken about in secret, a tremendous silence that still lives on. Human traffic to be exploited, the slaves. It was a very profitable business and one of the darkest moments in Western history. Without forced labour and the

8 These observations were made on November 17, 2022.

9 My observations were made on February 2, 2020 and November 3, 2021.

inhumane conditions of the slaves brought from Africa and other parts of the world, overseas trade would not have been so favourable or even possible. (Audio “Slaves,” Maritime Museum of Barcelona)

Although to mention enslavement is already an achievement in comparison to the deep silence of other Spanish museums about the topic, the enslaved are presented as merchandise, anonymous cargo, and not as subjects of history and resisters.¹⁰ The enslavers residing in Barcelona, for example Antonio López and Miquel Biada (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2007, 84–9), are presented as maritime entrepreneurs and heroes of industrialization. The origin of their fortune in the trade of enslaved Africans is omitted. The museum team is planning an exhibition about the involvement of Catalonia in the trade and exploitation of enslaved Africans. This exhibition has been announced since 2017. The lack of funding and a change in the museum’s management had stopped the project, which will now be held in 2023 (Garcia i Domingo 2020; Rodrigo y Alharilla 2020; 2021).

The enslavers and colonial merchants of the nineteenth century were proud of their businesses related to enslavement and did not try to hide them. Some of them displayed ocean-related commercial activities at their residences. The mansion of Tomás Ribalta (Palau Marc, today the seat of the cultural administration to the Catalan government), owner of three sugar plantations in central Cuba with several hundred enslaved workers, the uncle and associate of a human trafficker (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2007, 146–66; 2012, 84), displays a ship, an anchor, ropes, and the wheel of a sugar mill over the portal (Fig. 1). The palace of the Catalan enslaver José Xifré i Casas (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2012, 84–8), Porxos do Xifré, is decorated with portraits of maritime discoverers and conquerors, the heads of an Indigenous American and an African man, and technical seafaring items. Scenes from sugar fields are shown where *putti* represent the enslaved workers, an extremely perfidious form of belittling the deadly work regime in sugar-cane fields and a reproduction of the racist image of Africans as eternal children. One scene shows the challenge of an ocean storm and an attack by a sea monster, equating human traffic to an adventure story (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

10 The revindication that the enslaved should be re-humanized in museums and sites of memory through the narration of life stories and focus on their agency and resistance is not only a demand of the Afro-descendant activists all over Europe, it is also claimed by decolonial and anti-racist museum studies, see for example the request: “bringing the history of slavery to life through the power of individual stories especially those that go beyond traditional slave narratives, to reflect the historical agency of free and enslaved black Americans” (Gallas and DeWolf Perry 2015, xvi).

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FIG 1. Spain, Barcelona, detail of Palau Marc, mansion acquired 1876 by Tomás Ribalta, enslaver in Sagua La Grande, Cuba (2017). © Ulrike Schmieder

FIG 2-3. Spain, Barcelona, reliefs of Porxos do Xifré, luxury apartment house in 1840 built for trafficker of enslaved Africans, José Xifré i Casas (2020). © Ulrike Schmieder

In contrast to Nantes, the most important port town involved in the traffic of African captives in France, where an urban trail (with plaques in the public space) connects the Castle and Museum of History and the Memorial of the Abolition of Slavery and points to some enslaver residences,¹¹ in Barcelona such plaques do not yet exist. Postcolonial walks in the footsteps of enslavers and abolitionists are offered by engaged historians and memorial associations.¹² One can also do these tours following printed maps and websites indicating this conflicted heritage (Ajuntament 2016; Guzmán, Berenguer, and Laviña 2018).

At the opposite end of the spectrum of the treatment of the enslavement past is Cadiz. Cadiz had the monopoly of trade with the Americas in the eighteenth century, an era of prosperity, when the giant Catedral de las Ámericas was financed with colonial profits. This is reported everywhere with pride, not shame.¹³ The nostalgia for the “glorious” colonial and maritime past appears for instance on plaques on the main street, which mark the tricentenary of the transfer of the monopoly trade from Seville to Cadiz (2017). They show pictures of the harbour, the city, arriving sailing ships, and portraits of naval commanders and military engineers.

The touristic *Ruta de los Cargadores a Indias*, the route of monopoly traders with the Americas, does not mention the monopoly over human trafficking held by the Compañía Gaditana de Negros between 1765 and 1779 (Torres Ramírez 1973). The mansion of the Marqueses de Recaño, *cargadores a Indias* with the Torre Tavira belongs to that route and hosts a major tourist attraction, a *camara oscura*. The 45-metre-high tower became the official watchtower of Cadiz to observe the ships returning from ocean crossings in 1778. The permanent exhibition inside the tower explains to tourists in English, French, and German how Cadiz wishes to be seen. Below a world map, situated on a panel above the traded goods gold and silver (earned by Indigenous Americans in a forced labour system, which is not mentioned) and tropical staple goods sugar, coffee, tobacco, and cotton (produced by enslaved Africans, who are not mentioned either as workers or as merchandise), one reads:

11 My observations were made in October 2019.

12 I took part in such a tour with Javier Laviña and Omar Guzmán (tour guide of the *Asociació Coneixer Història*) in March 2017. Martín Rodrigo y Alharilla offered a walk in the footsteps of enslavers during the conference “Barcelona and Slavery” in 2021. The traces of less known enslavers buildings have been revealed in: Rodrigo 2022.

13 My observations were made in September 2018.

The XVIIIth century is the golden age of Cadiz. In this century, and in parallel with the prosperity of international trade, the city developed in every sense to such an extent that it could be considered one of the most important and advanced towns not only in Spain, but in Europe and in the whole world. [...] But the trading in Cadiz did not only involve the transport of goods, but also knowledge communication and the exchange of ideas between different cultures. This fact favoured the development of a much more liberal mentality amongst citizens of Cadiz, who became more open-minded, illustrated and cosmopolitan. (Plaque inside Torre Tavira)

The Museo de Historia Municipal (also Museo de las Cortes) refers to wars on the ocean, for instance with the model of the warship *Victory* (launched in 1765, the vessel on which Admiral Nelson met his death in 1805 during the Battle of Trafalgar), but it does not mention the traffic of enslaved Africans. Cadiz is proud of the liberal constitution of 1812 promulgated there, honoured with a big memorial dedicated to the Spanish Parliament, Las Cortes. But neither there, nor in the in the Centro Cultural del Doce celebrating the constitution, nor anywhere else in the city, is there any mention of the fact that the fundamental law did not abolish slavery, nor even the trade in enslaved Africans (Vila Vilar 2018) and gave citizen rights to Afro-descendant men only in exceptional cases. Colonial nostalgia is also expressed in streets named after the former colonies in America and various busts and statues on the sea promenade honouring white Spanish-American personalities. The ocean is conceived as space of lucrative commerce and source of the town's historical prosperity, but also as a space which unites Spaniards and (white) Hispano-Americans still today. The reasons Spanish-Americans had for forming their own states, independent from Spain, are silenced.

The "Calle de los negros" commemorates, without explanation, the African captives who were driven through this street from the port to the city. Up to 30,000 enslaved Africans were taken to Cadiz between the sixteenth century and the 1830s, the peak period being 1650–1700 (Morgado García 2013, 326). The existence of a confraternity of Africans in Cadiz (Nuestra Señora de la Salud, San Benito y Santa Ifigenia), which was forcibly closed and whose religious objects were stolen by white confraternities (Parrilla Ortiz 2001, 160–4), also goes unmentioned.

In the Cultural Foundation of Cadiz, the historian Fernando Osuna García explained to me that he mentions the slave trade and the *Compañía Gaditana de Negros* when he shows the Torre Tavira to visitors to the city. On Osuna's initiative, the topic of the trade in African humans appeared once in a municipal cartoon exhibition for young people on the occasion of the tricentenary of the transfer of the monopoly of American trade from

Seville to Cadiz. The main official exhibition in the Palace of the Provincial Government did not touch on such controversial matters (Osuna 2018).

Osuna was not aware that Cadiz also has a nineteenth-century history of enslavement. Research about enslavers and capital transfer from the illegal traffic and Cuban slavery economy to Cadiz (1820–1866) is still in its beginnings (Cozar Navarro and Rodrigo y Alharilla 2018; Cozar Navarro 2021). The recently published books referring to the role of Cadiz in Atlantic slavery received less attention than a similar publication about the slave traders of Catalonia (Rodrigo y Alharilla and Chaviano Pérez 2017b). This has also to do with the fact that the principal investigator of the topic in Cadiz, María del Carmen Cozar Navarro, married to a descendant of the enslaver Ignacio Fernández de Castro, had been reluctant to bring the results of her work to the public beyond the academic community (Cozar Navarro 2018; Pastrana Jiménez 2018; 2021). The local enslavers' residences in town were revealed recently (Pastrana Jiménez 2022; Vázquez-Fariñas 2022). This will make it possible to publish a guide on their traces in a city that still honours enslavers of the nineteenth century in the public space. Antonio López, the developer of the town's economy through his steamship company and a wharf, has a street named after him and a big memorial is dedicated to his son Claudio López Brú, II Marqués de Comillas. The latter had been the director of the Cadiz branch of his father's steamship company, and co-director of his colonial businesses. He became president of the Banco Hispano-Colonial, which financed the war against Cuban independence at exorbitant interest rates, and who was himself involved in colonial ventures. These included the exploitation of the inhabitants of the island of Biokó in the Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea, who worked on cocoa plantations in a neo-slavery system (Martino 2020). He acted as a Catholic donor with the slavery-based inheritance of his father and the profits of his own colonial enterprises (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2000, 184–92, 203–12, 236–40, 269–92, 295, 308–16). The giant memorial for Claudio López on the sea promenade, a column with a bust of Claudio López and the genius of Christianity at its top, reads on its pedestal "HOMENAJE AL CONSTANTE PROPAGANDISTA DE LA UNION HISPANOAMERICANA." The figures of a lion and a condor symbolize Europe and America united. The relief of a sailing ship alludes to ocean seafaring as the basis of the family wealth (Fig. 4).

"Counter-memories," voices of the descendants of the enslaved, are seldom to be heard in Cadiz. Most people of African descent in Cadiz are recently arrived refugees. They suffer from Anti-Blackness as a legacy of enslavement, but they are not descendants of those sold in America or Andalusia between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. A small



FIG 4. Spain, Cadiz, detail of monument for Claudio López Bru, II Marqués de Comillas (2018). © Ulrike Schmieder

Black Lives Matter demonstration took place on June 14, 2020. The local newspaper alluded to the involvement of Cadiz in the traffic of enslaved Africans on this occasion (Vera 2020). However, there was no demand to topple the monument of Claudio López or to decolonize the memorial cityscape (Pastrana Jiménez 2021).

As my observations revealed, in Barcelona, members of the academic community and anti-racist associations are aware that the Atlantic Ocean was a space where not only goods, but also human beings were traded. In the museums, however, the ocean remains above all a place of prosperous commerce, the legitimate source of Barcelona's wealth. The ocean is not seen as Glissant's abyss devouring African captives. There is no reference whatsoever to African resistance during the ocean crossings. References to enslavement are made during commemorative walks in the footsteps of enslavers, but not on plaques in the public space. The only text referring to the enslavement past is the plaque near the half-removed monument of the enslaver Antonio López, admitting at least that this man had "made his fortune during the slave trade" and fought with the *Círculo Hispano Ultramarino* for "the colonial *status quo* based on slave labour in Cuba and Puerto Rico."¹⁴ In Cadiz a handful of historians and journalists are aware of the town's involvement in enslavement. Even less is known about of

14 I quote from the plaque photographed on February 19, 2020.

the participation in the illegal traffic in human beings of the nineteenth century. Museums omit the topic completely. In the public space and in the museums the ocean is represented as a space where the lost golden age of Cadiz and the cosmopolitanism of its inhabitants were formed. In both towns visualizations and discourse about the maritime past in the public space and in the museums have not been decolonized. The removal of one enslaver's statue cannot be more than a very first step in that direction. The difference between both cities is that in Barcelona there is at least a continuous public debate with many social actors about the necessity to remember enslavement as part of the colonial past. In Cadiz, permanent discussions about the topic that reach the public consciousness are lacking.

An Island in the Caribbean Basin of the Atlantic Ocean: Memory Gaps and an Ambiguous Remembrance of Enslavement

On the other side of the Atlantic, the national identity of socialist Cuba is based on the joint fight of white and Black Cubans for independence from Spain and against Batista's dictatorship and neocolonial domination by the United States. What role do the memories of enslavement play in the dominant historical discourse and how is this master narrative expressed in museums, at memorials, and in the vestiges of the related maritime and inland history?

The research focuses on the port towns of Matanzas and Havana because of their leading role in the slavery-based plantation and urban economy as well as human trafficking, and as places where the most important museums and monuments are situated. In local museums the remembrance of enslavement has a certain place, as I observed in Matanzas itself, the town Colón in the province of Matanzas, and in the Afro-Cuban quarters on the margins of Havana, Guanabacoa, and Regla. In the province of Matanzas, there are tourist sites that present a distorted version of the enslavement past (e.g. the Dionisia coffee plantation near Matanzas). In the village of Méjico, formerly Álava, on the site of an old sugar plantation and modern sugar mill near Colón, the memories of the descendants of the enslaved are enacted, a unique grassroots initiative (Anneckchiarico 2018; Villegas Zulueta 2019). Only the Museo and Monumento del Esclavo Rebelde in Triunvirato focus on the resistance of the enslaved. The site of memory is also situated in this province, on the former plantation where a famous insurrection of the enslaved took place in 1843 (Finch 2015, 79–110).

The Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo in Matanzas is the only state museum in the Cuban West specifically devoted to enslavement, and an important site of the UNESCO Routes of Enslaved Peoples project (until 2022 “Slave Route”). The choice of the location makes sense because the province of Matanzas is the area of the industrialized mass enslavement of the nineteenth century, the so-called Second Slavery (Tomich 2004, 75–94; Zeuske 2004, 310–31). However, Havana would have been the better choice. Havana, the capital surrounded by plantations, was the political and economic centre of Cuba as a sugar colony, the landing port of most African captives,¹⁵ and the centre of urban enslavement (Deschamps Chapeaux 1971). The most prominent enslavers lived in Havana even if their haciendas were situated in the Matanzas region (Perret 2008). A museum in Havana would reach a much bigger international public and more national visitors because the severe transport problems in Cuba prevent most Cubans from travelling around their country.

Matanzas is situated on the margins of tourist Cuba. Moreover, the place chosen for the museum, the Castillo San Severino, is located outside the city centre, on the waterfront of the port of Matanzas. There is no direct bus route to the place. The museum is not part of the regular tourist circuit. The historical reasons for choosing this isolated building are not very convincing. The fortress was built by the enslaved, like everything else in colonial Cuba; it guarded the port that was also, but not only, a port of arrival of enslaved Africans; it served as a place of punishment for the enslaved but also for free patriots. It was not a place for holding the enslaved, like the forts in Africa that are part of the Routes of Enslaved Peoples. Any former enslaver mansion in the city centre could have been selected as a memorial site with just as much reason.

The museum has only two rooms related to the topic, one devoted to enslavement itself, one devoted to Afro-Cuban religions and thus to the omnipresent folkloric-touristic concept of *Afrocubanía*. The director Isabel Hernández has big plans for a multimedia, interactive room (*centro de interpretación*) with much more visual and textual information about slavery, as well as about human trafficking. For instance, an interactive tool will show the routes over the ocean and the landing points (Hernández 2019).¹⁶ Until now the displays refer to plantations, work, and torture, resistance

15 TSTD II 2022: Under “itinerary, principal place of slave landing,” one finds 1,147 entries for Havana, 619 for other Cuban ports.

16 This room was to be opened in September 2022 according to the information given by Mrs. Hernández in a telephone call on June 23, 2022, but in the media there is no information about the inauguration of that space to be found.

through rebellions, and the archaeology of maroon settlements.¹⁷ A map of Africa and “documents related to the trade in African slaves in the port of Matanzas (19th century)” are exhibited. The museum did not portray the ocean as a space of deportation of human beings and a giant graveyard, until in 2021 a model of a “slave trade ship” had been installed. The nearness of the Atlantic is referred to also in one room that tells the general history of the fortress, which is narrated without reference to local human trafficking. The Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo does not display any document expressing the views of the enslaved, despite the existence of petitions and judicial proceedings in which the enslaved made their voices heard (García Rodríguez 1996; Hevia Lanier 2011; Perera Díaz and Meriño Fuentes 2015). The remembrance of resistance is connected to liberation wars on plantations, not to resistance on board of deportation ships, even though rebellions did occur on Cuban ships, including the famous *Amistad* case (Zeuske 2014). Matanzas retains its nineteenth-century definition as the “Athens of Cuba” given to the town in the age of socio-economic and cultural prosperity based on enslaved labour. The origin of its wealth and culture in the profits of enslavement is admitted, but not focused on, for instance in the Provincial Museum in a former enslaver residence.

Interestingly, in the port town of Matanzas, historical reminders of the ocean, sea, and ships are less present in the public space than in Barcelona and Cadiz. In the surviving mansions of plantation owners and merchants, such elements are not (or through decay no longer?) to be found. Recent visualizations of the intertwining between the ocean and human trafficking are in two very different places. Street art in the historic centre presents images of urban Matanzas and rural sugar centrals with ocean waves, underwater scenes, and a Black mermaid. The inscription on this painting in the city centre describes enslaved rebels (who appear in one scene of the mural) as “precursors of our social revolutions,” quoting Fidel Castro. What is exceptional and not to be found in state museums is the commemoration of African heroes by mentioning their individual names: “Antonio Congo, José Dolores (Mayimbe), Micaela, Carlota, Fermina, Manuel Mandinga, Eduardo, Pedro Gangá,” all prominent leaders of the local liberation wars on the sugar plantations of Triunvirato and Ácana in 1843 (Finch 2015, 79–110) (Fig. 5).

Another piece of street art of the semi-private Afro-Athens project in the Afro-Cuban quarter of Pueblo Nuevo (without a tip no tourist will get there) shows two ships, one with enslaved Africans on board cresting the ocean waves, and a mermaid looking towards them. Some captives are

17 My observations were made on February 8 and 14, 2019.



FIG 5. Cuba, Matanzas, detail of a mural in the historic city centre (2019). © Ulrike Schmieder



FIG 6. Cuba, Matanzas, detail of mural in Pueblo Nuevo, Callejón de Tradiciones (2019). © Ulrike Schmieder

depicted with symbols of Yoruban deities (e.g. the double axe for the God of Thunder, Shangó), pointing to the cultural heritage brought to Cuba from West Africa (Fig. 6). The aim of the social-cultural project is explicitly the empowerment of a poor and marginalized community via turning to African roots and their values (Torres 2019).

In the port town of Havana, the ocean surrounds the city centre, Habana Vieja, a peninsula in the Caribbean Sea. The town was built by free African artisans and enslaved African workers. The wealth that allowed the construction of the historic centre, which is nothing other than an accumulation of enslaver mansions, came from the exploitation of enslaved labourers on coffee and sugar fields in the provinces of Havana and Matanzas. Afro-Cuban academics I interviewed were deeply annoyed about the restoration of Old Havana for the 500th anniversary of the city in 2019 (Zurbano 2019; Chailloux 2019; Herrera 2019; Rubiera Castillo 2019). Old Havana is reconstructed as a colonial white city; the commemorative plaques mention ennobled human traffickers and owners of enslaved workers living there. Not a single plaque informs people that a mansion was built by the enslaved and that enslaved people lived there. Some Afro-Cuban guides in mansions converted into museums told me on their own initiative where the family's enslaved lived. There is no monument to the enslaved as victims or rebels in the capital of Cuba. Afro-Cuban

intellectuals have asked for a monument for José Antonio Aponte, the Black leader of the antislavery, anticolonial conspiracy of 1812, executed on a very central square in Havana (Childs 2006). Promises were made, but nothing has happened as yet (Feraudy Espino 2019). In 2020, the still existing monuments for enslavers and defenders of slavery remained untouched (Schmieder 2021a).

The remembrance of enslavement stays confined to a few museums (and there is none exclusively dedicated to that topic) and the remembrance of the traffic of African captives has been eradicated nearly completely. The two museums most connected with the history of oceans, the Museum of Navigation/Castillo de la Real Fuerza and the Museo del Castillo de la Punta, focus on discovery and conquest, wars, and pirates in the Caribbean. They omit enslavement as part of their history, even though Havana had to be defended by forts against the English and the French because the other powers wanted to control Cuba's lucrative slavery economy. The Castillo de la Punta was the place where deportation ships landed after quarantine (Zeuske 2021, 490–1). Neither this site nor the site where the enslaved were sold, the Plaza Vieja in Havana (Zurbano 2019), have got even a small plaque in memory of this criminal commerce and its victims.

Enslavement is explained in one room in the Casa de África. It is not connected here with the traffic and the Atlantic, except in one caption about "*la trata*," trade, showing a ship transporting African captives. The focus is more on plantation work in the interior and the resistance of the enslaved there, through rebellions and maroonage. A connection between enslavement and the Atlantic is made only in the new Museum of History in the Palacio de Segundo Cabo. Human trafficking appears in a documentary film about the geographical origins of Cubans, also showing a deportation ship arriving with enslaved Africans. In the cartography room, maps and documentaries refer to wars between European powers in the Caribbean, but they do not mention the role of trafficking of enslaved Africans therein. The museum's references to rural enslavement (without documents reflecting the perspectives of captives), agricultural goods produced by enslaved workers, rebellions of the enslaved, and Afro-Cuban religion and music are uncoupled from ocean history and human trafficking. The history of Cuba is narrated as if the maritime history and the history of the island's interior had nothing to do with each other.

As in Matanzas, I found a hidden place on the margins of Havana where the ocean is visualized as a space that connects the descendants of African captives with their mythical African roots: in the house of the Afro-Cuban priest, Julián Hernández Jova, priest of the Asociación de los Hijos de San



FIG 7. Martinique, Le Diamant, monument CAP 110, *Mémoire et Fraternité* (2022). © Ulrike Schmieder

Lázaro in Guanabacoa. Here the enforced coming of the forefathers in a ship that crossed the ocean is evoked in a indoor mural inside the house.¹⁸

Not hidden, but highly visible and much frequented, is Martinique's memorial *Cap 110, Mémoire et fraternité* in Le Diamant, created in 1998 by Laurent Valère (Fig. 7).¹⁹ It is located at Anse Caffard, a beach where a deportation ship sank in 1830, and consists of 15 giant white statues placed on the shore looking back to the Gulf of Guinea across the Atlantic Ocean. The ocean is interpreted here as a graveyard from which the victims will one day be resurrected (Reinhardt 2006, 139–43).

Cuba, where nearly one million African captives were deported to between 1511 and 1866 (Eltis and Felipe-González 2020, 204–5), has no such memorial. As the research showed, some archival documents or fragments of documentaries exhibited in museums and some references in street art are all that exists as public remembrance of that infamous human traffic. On the other hand, maritime history is told in state museums as a history of ships and fortresses, piracy, and war as if those had nothing to do with

18 My observations in his Casa de Santos were made on February 5, 2019.

19 My observations were made on April 11, 2022. The memorial becomes a *lieu de mémoire* in Nora's sense through celebrations each May 22, the national commemorative day remembering the self-liberation of the enslaved (Schmieder 2021a, 380–2).

enslavement. In museum narratives, the ocean is a space crossed by all populations who arrived in the island; it is not a watery grave, an abyss, a space of horror. In contrast to Spain, armed resistance and maroonage of the enslaved play a role in museum discourse about inland plantation slavery. However, family relations, everyday life and resistance, and life stories of individual African captives are missing.

Concluding Remarks: Tentative Explanations

Why then does this silence about the trade in African captives and enslavement on plantations (in Cadiz and other port towns)²⁰ or distorted narratives without identifying perpetrators, victims, and resisters of enslavement (in Barcelona) exist? Why the not at all *postcolonial* pride in the seafaring “adventures” of the brave conqueror, warrior, and merchant ancestors? And why the remembrance of the ocean as a space that enriched these admirable forefathers, not as the space of a centuries-long crime against humanity? Tentative answers were given in the above-mentioned interviews with historians engaged in the politics of memory with respect to enslavement (Laviña 2020; Rodrigo y Alharilla 2020; Fradera 2020) and the below-mentioned conversations with members of the Afro-Spanish movement. They refer to three points.²¹

- 1) The still unhealed traumas and legacies of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship overlay the memories of colonialism. Left-wing city councils like that of Cadiz and Barcelona aspire to remove Falange symbols and to establish sites of memory for murdered Republicans first. They postpone a decolonial revision of the memorial sites in the urban space (Osuna 2018; Rabassa and Llorens 2020). This approach should be contested because the politics of memory referring to the Franco dictatorship should look at possible continuities between the enslaver elites of the nineteenth century and the oligarchic and fascist elites of the twentieth century. Historians in Cadiz should find out if there is a clandestine influence on public opinion and political decisions by descendants of enslavers *today*, as has been proven for the Catalanian and central Spanish governments (Rodrigo y Alharilla 2021a, 9–26; Rodrigo y Alharilla and Chaviano Pérez 2017a, 7–10).

20 I can confirm from personal observation the deliberate oblivion of the enslavement past also for San Fernando de Cadiz, Bilbao, and Valencia.

21 These ideas about Spain were developed with Martín Rodrigo y Alharilla (Rodrigo y Alharilla and Schmieder 2023).

- 2) Most of the Spanish population obviously does not want to challenge the image of Spain's glorious imperial past, related to the idea that Spaniards were and are less racist than other (post)colonial nations and that Indigenous populations such as the Aztecs should be grateful for having been freed from their despotic rulers and missionized in the Catholic faith. They do not connect colonial history with the enslavement of Africans, which is ascribed to other colonial powers alone. The historical narrative of colonial pride is expressed in the book *Imperiofobia* by María Elvira Roca Barea (2016), a bestseller despite its many errors and failure to meet basic academic standards. The book omits enslavement completely.
- 3) The Afro-Spanish movement is less influential than the Afro-Caribbean associations in the United Kingdom and France with their advances in a decolonial critical remembrance of enslavement (Hourcade 2014, confirmed by my own research on Spain and France). The underdeveloped relations between critical historians studying the enslavement past and its repercussions on the Iberian Peninsula and the Afro-Spanish communities prevent an effective lobbying for a decolonial reform of memorial cityscapes. According to the UNCHR Report (2018) and interviews conducted in the Afro-Spanish community (Toasije 2018; Caballero 2018; Caballero and Rocabruno 2018; Moreno 2018), the exclusion of the Afro-Spanish community and associations from representation at all parliamentary and state governance levels, cultural institutions, the media and academia, as well as the heterogeneity of the Afro-Spanish community and internal conflicts, impeded any significant influence on state politics of memory until now. Thus, the Afro-diasporic counter-memories remain separated in community-based commemorations like *Conciencia Afro* in Madrid or *Black Barcelona*.


With respect to Cuba, the reasons for the general neglect of the remembrance of enslavement, the absence of the perspective of the enslaved and their descendants in the museums, and non-recognition of the contributions of Afro-Cubans to national history in anti-Black racism of the governing white middle class, and the taboo of speaking about it, have been affirmed in the above-mentioned interviews (Zurbano 2019; Chailloux 2019; Herrera 2019; Rubiera Castillo 2019; Feraudy Espino 2019) and in the publications of de la Fuente (2008), Romay (2015), and Zurbano (2021). I agree with these evaluations and add here as a cause of the memory gaps about enslavement the underrepresentation of Afro-Cubans in leading positions in the curatorship of museums and cultural politics. Out of twelve museums and archaeological sites that referred in detail to enslavement, only

two were directed by Persons of Colour (the Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo and the Museo de Arqueología in Trinidad). All the other directors or leading researchers of state museums, including the municipal museums of the Afro-Cuban towns of Regla and Guanabacoa and the Museo de la Rebeldía Esclava in Triunvirato, were white. This is one explanation for the absence of the voices of the enslaved and their descendants in the museums, and the silence about the human trafficking where it happened. White state functionaries decide what to tell about the history of Afro-Cuba.

The specific neglect of the traffic of enslaved Africans in maritime history has gone largely unnoticed in Cuban and international historiography until now. This might have to do with a decades-long silence about the topic in Cuba, between the early works of José Luciano Franco (1976) and a new historiography (Barcia Zequeira et al. 2017). During visits to the mentioned museums and touristic sites, massive gaps in knowledge about that topic by museum staff and guides became apparent.

To summarize finally, in Spain maritime history is represented in museums and at memorial sites in the public space as a history of adventurous seafaring, “discoveries” and conquest, piracy and sea wars, and lucrative commerce in exotic goods. The Atlantic Ocean is not described as space of traffic of African captives, and where some remarks on the topic are made, as in Barcelona’s museums, the enslaved are dehumanized as merchandise and their historical agency neglected. Whereas some specialized Cuban museums refer the resistance of the enslaved, museums devoted explicitly to maritime history omit the commerce in enslaved Africans, too. Visualizations of human trafficking are rather to be found in street art and at the Casas de Santos. In both countries, a decolonization of the language and discourse in museums and in the public space has not taken place yet.

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